

“Three Questions” by Leo Tolstoy

■ 1. Introduction

“The Three Questions” is a short story written by the famous Russian writer **Leo Tolstoy**. It presents a **moral and philosophical lesson** through the story of a king who seeks answers to three important life questions.

The story teaches that **the right time, the right people, and the right actions** lead to true success in life.

■ 2. About the Author – Leo Tolstoy

- Full name: **Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy**
 - Born: **September 9, 1828**, Yasnaya Polyana, Russia
 - Died: **November 20, 1910**
 - Famous works: *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina*, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*
 - Known for: His deep understanding of human life, simplicity, and moral philosophy.
 - Believed in: Non-violence, truth, and service to humanity.
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■ 3. Time of Writing and Publication

- Written in: **1885**
 - Published in: **1885 in a collection titled “What Men Live By, and Other Tales”**
 - Original language: **Russian**
 - Type: **Moral and philosophical short story**
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■ 4. Theme

The central theme is **the search for the right way to live life**. It highlights the importance of:

- Doing good to others
 - Living in the present moment
 - Acting with kindness and understanding
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■ 5. Message

The story gives a **universal message** —

- The **most important time** is the **present moment**.
 - The **most important person** is the one **you are with now**.
 - The **most important work** is to **do good to that person**.
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■ 6. Moral

- Live in the present and make it meaningful.
 - Help others selflessly.
 - True wisdom lies in love, kindness, and compassion.
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■ 7. Brief Account of the Story

A king wanted answers to three questions:

1. What is the right time to begin everything?
 2. Who are the most important people to work with?
 3. What is the most important thing to do?
- He met a hermit who finally helped him understand the true answers through practical experience — by saving the life of a wounded man.
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■ 8. Characters

- **The King** – A thoughtful and kind ruler searching for wisdom.
 - **The Hermit** – A wise old man living in a forest who gives the king true knowledge.
 - **The Wounded Man** – The king's enemy, who is saved and forgiven by the king.
 - **The Bodyguards & Advisors** – Minor roles.
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■ 9. Summary of the Story

The king, eager to always succeed, seeks answers to three vital questions. Scholars fail to satisfy him, so he visits a wise hermit.

While digging the hermit's ground, the king meets a wounded man and saves him. Later, the

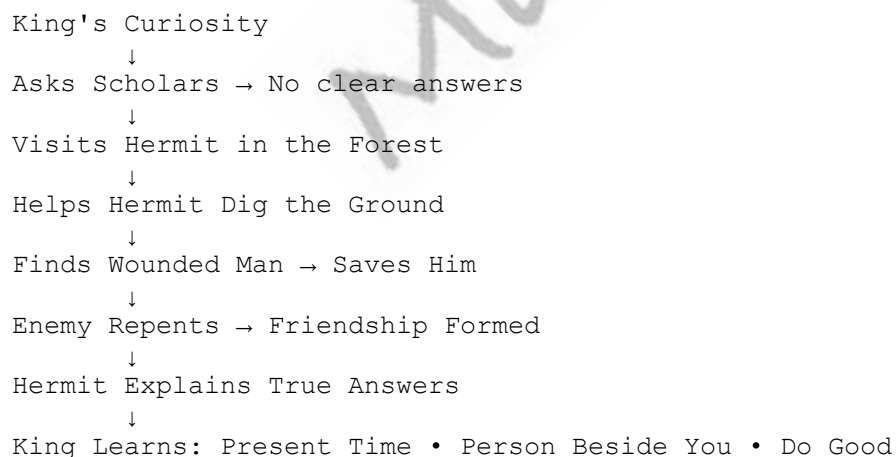
man reveals he had planned to kill the king but now feels grateful.
Through this event, the king realizes:

- The **present moment** is the right time,
- The **person beside you** is most important, and
- The **best act** is to **do good**.

■ 10. Story at a Glance (All Major & Minor Points)

Part	Event
Beginning	King's curiosity about three questions.
Middle	Seeks answers from wise men → none satisfy him → visits hermit.
Climax	Helps hermit dig → saves wounded man.
Falling Action	Learns the man was his enemy. They reconcile.
End	Realizes true answers through experience, returns home wiser.

■ 10. Flowchart of the Story



11. Word Nest (with meanings & parts of speech)

Word	Part of Speech	Meaning
Hermit	noun	a person who lives alone away from society for spiritual reasons
Wounded	adjective	injured or hurt
Dig	verb	to break and turn up soil
Compassion	noun	deep sympathy and concern for others' suffering
Forgive	verb	to pardon someone for a fault
Enemy	noun	a person who wishes harm
Wisdom	noun	the ability to use knowledge rightly
Present	noun/adjective	the current time / existing now
Goodness	noun	moral excellence or kindness
Repentance	noun	feeling sorry for one's wrong deeds
Deed	noun	an action performed intentionally
Patience	noun	the ability to wait calmly
Companion	noun	a person who is with you
Serve	verb	to help or work for someone
Success	noun	achievement of a goal

12. Paragraph-wise Summary

1. King wonders how to never fail and asks three questions.
2. Learned men give different answers.
3. King visits hermit for guidance.
4. Helps hermit dig the ground.
5. Saves a wounded stranger.
6. Man confesses he planned to kill the king.
7. King forgives him.
8. Hermit explains that real answers lie in living and acting right now.

13. Short Questions (2 Marks – 40 Words Each)

- What three questions troubled the king?**
The king wanted to know the right time for every action, the right people to work with, and the most important thing to do to avoid failure in life.
- Why was the king dissatisfied with the scholars' answers?**
Each learned man gave a different opinion. Their answers confused rather than helped him, so the king was not satisfied and decided to seek the hermit's advice.
- Why did the king visit the hermit alone?**
The hermit met only common people, not nobles. Therefore, the king dressed simply, left his guards behind, and went alone to meet him in the forest.
- What work was the hermit doing when the king arrived?**
The hermit was digging the ground outside his hut. He was old and weak, so the king offered to take the spade and dig the soil himself.
- Describe the wounded man.**
The man came running from the woods, bleeding badly from his stomach. The king bandaged his wound, gave him water, and stayed beside him all night.
- What truth did the wounded man reveal?**
He confessed that he had planned to kill the king to avenge his brother but was wounded by the king's guards instead. He thanked the king for saving his life.
- How did the king forgive his enemy?**
The king kindly forgave the man, promised to send his servants and doctors, and made peace with him, turning an enemy into a friend.
- What lesson did the king learn from the hermit?**
The hermit taught that the present moment is the only time that matters, the person with us is most important, and doing good is our greatest duty.
- What does the wounded man's change show?**
It shows that kindness can transform hatred into love. When treated with compassion, even an enemy can become a loyal friend.
- What kind of person was the king?**
The king was humble, curious, and kind-hearted. Instead of using power, he worked and served others to find the truth about life.

14. Broad Questions (6 Marks – 100 Words Each)

- Explain how the king finally got answers to his three questions.**
The king found no satisfactory answers from scholars, so he visited a hermit. By helping the hermit dig and caring for a wounded man, he learned through action. The hermit later explained that the present moment is the most important time, the person with us is the most important one, and doing good is the most important work. These experiences made the king realize that real wisdom is gained by serving others selflessly and living meaningfully in the present.

2. **What moral lessons does Tolstoy teach through the story?**

Tolstoy shows that true peace and wisdom come from kindness, forgiveness, and presence of mind. The story reminds us that time is precious and that helping others is our highest duty. The king's compassion toward the wounded man brings harmony and happiness. It encourages us to forget past wrongs, be kind to all, and act with love and sincerity in each moment.

3. **Describe the king's character.**

The king is thoughtful and humble. Instead of relying only on power or advisors, he seeks wisdom. He helps the hermit by digging and forgives his wounded enemy. His patience, humility, and kindness make him an ideal ruler who values human life and moral truth over pride and wealth.

4. **What is the role of the hermit in the story?**

The hermit symbolizes inner wisdom. He doesn't answer directly but makes the king experience the truth through actions. By engaging the king in service and compassion, the hermit helps him realize that practical goodness is greater than theoretical knowledge.

5. **How does the story highlight the value of time?**

Time is the story's central idea. Tolstoy teaches that only the present moment truly belongs to us; the past is gone and the future is uncertain. Therefore, wise people use their present time for good deeds, kindness, and meaningful actions toward others.

6. **How does the wounded man's change of heart add meaning to the story?**

The wounded man, once an enemy, becomes a friend when the king saves him. This incident proves that forgiveness and compassion can erase hatred. It also completes the king's lesson that doing good in the present brings peace to both sides.

7. **Why did Tolstoy use simple characters for a deep message?**

Tolstoy wanted everyone to understand that wisdom is not found in books but in action. By using a king, a hermit, and a common man, he shows that truth and goodness are universal values that apply to all human beings.

8. **Explain the symbolic meaning of the wounded man.**

The wounded man represents anger, revenge, and human weakness. When healed by the king's kindness, he symbolizes forgiveness and peace. His change teaches that love can heal even the deepest wounds of hatred.

9. **What answers did the hermit give to the king's three questions?**

He said: the most important time is **now**, the person with you is the **most important**, and the best work is to **do good** for that person. These answers summarize the moral of life and show that wisdom lies in simple truths.

10. **How is "The Three Questions" relevant to modern life?**

The story remains timeless because it teaches lessons of mindfulness, compassion, and service. In today's busy world, it reminds us to focus on the present, value relationships, and act kindly. Living with awareness and empathy leads to peace and satisfaction.
